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## HOUSTON CHRONICLE ARCHIVES

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### Ruling expected to quiet train horns / Federal law set for April 1 to affect railroad crossings

By HEATHER SAUCIER, Houston Chronicle Correspondent

Peace and quiet could be on their way to West University Place and Bellaire, as the Federal Railroad Administration plans to publish the final rule on April 1 regarding the sounding of train horns at railroad crossings.

After meeting with city of Houston officials who are preparing to implement quiet zones from San Felipe to Willowbend Boulevard, City Manager Michael Ross said he estimates it will take an additional 30 days after the rule is published before cities can begin making the necessary improvements to the designated intersections.

"It looks very positive," he said.

In the final rule, initially set to be published last October, the FRA extended the public comment period because of overwhelming correspondence from the public nationwide, said FRA spokesman Warren Flatau.

The new federal law will require railroads to pre-empt state laws and sound their whistles at all railroad crossings. The sounding of horns now remains subject to state law.

Intersections that have appropriate improvements, such as quad gates and non-mountable curbs, can be designated quiet zones.

In addition to the locomotive horn rule, the FRA also will require that train horns be no louder than 110 decibels and railroad companies will be allowed to retrofit their locomotives over time, Flatau said.

Foundation design

After reviewing current city building codes relating to foundations, the West University Place Building and Standards Commission recommended changes to the way foundations are designed and poured.

In a Monday workshop session, chairman Bryant Slimp said since 1992, the city has experienced 12 foundation failures and identified several goals reached by the commission to counter the problem.

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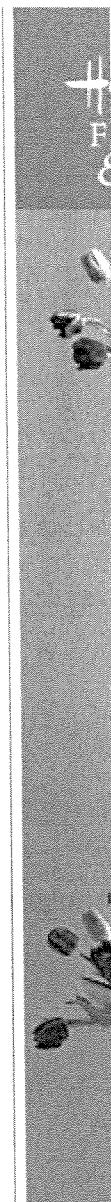
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These goals include to protect current and subsequent homeowners from poor construction; discourage homeowners and developers from choosing foundation designs based solely on economics; and protect property values and the city's tax base.

He recommended the city set standards for foundation design by requiring a licensed or registered professional engineer who works at an engineering firm to design and install foundations, in addition to requiring engineers and professional geoscientists to carry errors and omission insurance.

Engineers should also file observation and certification reports with the city, which should maintain the reports as permanent records, Slimp said.

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